

Resources ▾ Leading Ideas ▾ Stewardship ▾ Reaching Others ▾ Pastoral Excellence ▾ Learning ▾ About ▾

You Are At: Home » Leading Ideas » Developing an Intentional Discipleship System

Leading Ideas

| Developing an Intentional Discipleship System

By Junius B. Dotson On February 21, 2018

Leading Ideas

Share:



Junius B. Dotson says that churches cannot do the hard and intentional work of making disciples unless they are clear about what a disciple is and how disciples are formed. He outlines the key characteristics of a more intentional system for forming disciples.

If you say to average church leaders, "Tell me a little about what your church does," they will typically respond with a list of activities and ministries: "We worship at 8:30 and 11:00. Sunday School is between the two services. We go on a mission trip to repair homes in June, and we have a bible study that meets on Wednesday nights." All these things are good and should be a part of what we do as a church, but when we are asked what our church does, our answer should be, "We make disciples."

“ There is no cookie-cutter approach to making disciples, and each disciple’s journey and each church’s process is unique. And yet we must take our part in the discipleship process seriously as it has been entrusted to us by Jesus.

What is a Disciple?

Let’s be honest. If we do not know what a disciple is or how they are formed, we will never know how to make them. The lack of clarity here keeps us from doing the hard and intentional work of making disciples. We must know the basic characteristics of a disciple, and we must think intentionally about how our church’s ministries and opportunities work together to assist in disciple formation.

Keep it simple. People intuitively know how to define a disciple. You want to give language to the people in the pews that is accessible and easy to remember. I have often used this definition: *A disciple is one who knows Christ, is growing in Christ, serving Christ, and sharing Christ.* This language can be tweaked for your context. The main thing is that you take the time to develop and clarify your definition of a disciple.

Characteristics of an Intentional Discipleship System

Intentional discipleship means we know and have planned out the many ways that people new to the faith enter into our church’s discipleship system and move through it on their way to growth and maturity. We then clearly communicate the opportunities that disciples have through the church and offer ways to self-assess and reflect upon the next steps for their spiritual journey.

Every intentional discipleship system should include clarity around three things.

Subscribe f

Every Wednesday. Lea
and strategies f

E-Mai

| Search

Search ...

| The Right Question

**Leaders do not need
Leaders must have i**

Trevor Dancer, pastor
in Kansas City, Misso
question in a sermon

*If people knew how m
to give more themse*

Want more *Right Question
Leaders.*

1. Characteristics of a Disciple

What does discipleship look like at each stage of growth? Here's an example. A disciple:

- Worships
- Is part of a community
- Commits to spiritual practices
- Is generous and serves
- Is seeking to be Christlike

2. Characteristics of a Maturing Disciple

For each of the characteristics of a disciple you name, develop language that best describes what you hope will be the end product for your discipleship system. What will maturing disciples look like for each? For example:

- **Worship.** They begin to worship every day, including the Sabbath, inviting others.
- **Community.** They build relationships with others and share with them the life and community that they have found in God and their faith community.
- **Spiritual Practices.** They enjoy and practice spiritual disciplines and they begin to show others how to use spiritual disciplines to grow in faith and be drawn closer to God.
- **Generosity and Service.** They tithe and give beyond a tithe as God leads and restructures their lives and resources to join Jesus in service to others.
- **Christlike.** They partner with God and invite others to explore the life and teachings of Jesus.

3. Stages of Growth in the System

How does a disciple grow? What are the basic stages of growth that your community recognizes as part of discipleship growth. One example is: Believing, Behaving, Belonging. Another example is:

- **Searching.** Seeking to make sense of life: asking questions like, "What gives my life purpose, joy, and fulfillment?"
- **Exploring.** Attend, but not belong; may not be committed to follow Jesus; wrestling with God's presence in our lives.
- **Beginning.** Beginning to understand and put into practice a newfound faith; excited about our faith, but still have doubts.
- **Growing.** Eager to be identified as a follower of Christ; taking personal responsibility for a growing relationship with Jesus; beginning to integrate faith into life in a holistic way and looking to Jesus for help.
- **Maturing.** Moving toward surrender of our lives to Jesus; longing to know, love, obey, serve, and be with Jesus as a disciple; beginning to make disciples.

Context, Language, and Ownership

As you consider the basic principles of an intentional discipleship system, make it your own. Each church and ministry setting has a unique context. Your setting has language and terms that work best for you. It is only by making these basic concepts and language your own that your church leadership and people will be able to own the system.

The aim is not that you adopt this specific system, but that you become intentional about your system. Indeed, there is no cookie-cutter approach to making disciples, and each disciple's journey and each church's process is unique. And yet we, as disciples of Jesus, have a role to play in our own growth as individual disciples, in our accountability to and with other disciples, and in the formation of an intentional discipleship system for our church. We must take our part in the discipleship process seriously as it has been entrusted to us by Jesus.

This material is adapted from *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius Dotson, published by Discipleship Ministries, and available as a free download at seeallthepeople.org.

Related Resources

- *Becoming an Outward-Focused Church*, a Leading Ideas Talks Podcast featuring Junius Dotson
- *16 Signs Your Church May Need a Renewed Focus on Disciple Making* by Ken Willard and Mike Schreiner
- *7 Steps for Making Disciples Through Relational Mentoring* by Ken Carter and Audrey Warren
- *What is Your Faith Development Process?* by Bob Farr and Kay Kotan

| Quotable Leadership

People rarely appreciate themselves inside friends and self-confirms are constantly reinforced

Yuval Harari

| Most Popular Posts

February 1, 2018
Developing an Intentional Discipleship System

March 7, 2018
When Can We Expect to See the End of the World?

February 1, 2018
16 Signs Your Church May Need a Renewed Focus on Disciple Making

February 1, 2018
Boring Announcements: How to Make Them Engaging

March 14, 2018
7 Ways to Make the Most of Your Church's Social Media Presence

| Most Popular Topics

Books

Change

Community Outreach

Congregational Formation

Evangelism

Faith

Fruitfulness

Future

Hospitality

Lay Leadership

Leadership Best Practices

Lessons for Leaders

Millennials

Mission

Pastoral Ministry

Planning and Visioning

Reach New People

Serve Your Neighborhood

Stewardship

Ta

Discipleship

Faith Formation

Reach New Disciples

To the Point

Vision

V

Worship

Worship

Share.

f

✉

🐦

g+

📌

in

t

🖨

| Video Tool Kits & Eboo

About Author

Junius B. Dotson

Junius Dotson is General Secretary of Discipleship Resources, the general agency of The United Methodist Church responsible for resourcing, training, and supporting spiritual formation, new church development, and revitalization of local churches. Previously, he served as senior pastor of Saint Mark United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas.

Optimizin

\$75.00

Related Posts

March 13, 2018

Reaching More Diverse People in Suburbs

February 21, 2018

16 Signs Your Church May Need a Renewed Focus on Disciple Making

March 14, 2018

Moving Beyond Church in A Box

Developi

\$59.00

Theology

\$59.00

Adult Education Studies from the Wesley Ministry Network

The Wesley Ministry Network brings the best of contemporary Christian scholarship to your congregation's small groups and adult Bible studies. These video-based group study courses encourage the energetic discussion and personal reflection that are keys to a life of informed discipleship. Courses are designed for use in small groups in a wide range of denominations, but they are also appropriate for individuals seeking self-study opportunities. [Learn more now.](#)

Ecumenical studies: *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* | *Journey through the Psalms* | *Devotion to Jesus: The Divinity of Christ in Earliest Christianity* | *Serious Answers to Hard Questions* | *Religion and Science: Pathways to Truth* | *In God's Time* | *A Life Worthy of the Gospel* | *Women Speak of God*

United Methodist studies: *Methodist Identity — Part 1: Our Story; Part 2: Our Beliefs* | *Wesleyan Studies Project — Series I: Methodist History; Series II: Methodist Doctrine; Series III: Methodist Evangelism*

<div>Connect</div> <div>Lewis Center for Church Leadership</div> <div>Wesley Theological Seminary</div> <div>New phone number (202) 664-5700</div> <div>Fax (202) 885-8605</div> <div>lewiscenter@wesleyseminary.edu</div> <div>4500 Massachusetts Ave., NW</div> <div>Washington, DC 20016</div>	<div>Resources</div> <div>Tool Kits</div> <div>50 Ways</div> <div>Leading Ideas Articles</div> <div>Leading Ideas Talks Podcast</div> <div>Books</div> <div>To the Point Sheets</div> <div>Free Videos</div> <div>Online Learning</div> <div>Research</div> <div>Clergy Age Trends</div> <div>Leading Ideas</div> <div>Subscribe</div> <div>Articles</div> <div>Leading Ideas Talks Podcast</div> <div>Authors</div> <div>Topics</div> <div>Reprint Info</div>	<div>Stewardship</div> <div>Giving and Generosity</div> <div>Church Finances</div> <div>Clergy Personal Finances</div> <div>Reaching Others</div> <div>Reach New Disciples</div> <div>Serve Your Neighbor</div> <div>Pastoral Excellence</div> <div>LPLI-360 Evaluation</div> <div>Preventing Misconduct</div> <div>Pastoral Transitions</div> <div>Young Clergy</div> <div>Lewis Fellows</div> <div>Clergy Mentoring</div> <div>Clergy Evaluation</div> <div>Clergy Personal Finances</div> <div>Focus for Denominational Leaders</div> <div>DS Resources</div>	<div>Learning</div> <div>Leadership D.Mir</div> <div>Online Learning</div> <div>Lewis Fellows</div> <div>Wesley Theologi</div> <div>Lewis Communit</div> <div>About</div> <div>Staff</div> <div>News</div> <div>Shop</div> <div>Adult Christian E</div> <div>Stewardship Vide</div> <div>Leadership Exce</div> <div>Reach New Disci</div> <div>PDF Ebooks</div> <div>Donate</div>
---	--	--	---

		BOM Resources	Lovett H. Weems
© 2018 Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary			